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THE RELATIONS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

A SYMPOSIUM

The following letter, with appended list of questions, was sent to twenty-seven prominent scholars, instead of the twenty originally selected. Historians, economists, political scientists, and sociologists were included. Nineteen replies were received. Of these thirteen were courteous acknowledgments of the request, with reasons for not answering the questions. Six writers replied to the questions submitted, and the answers are printed in the alphabetical order of their authors' names.

THE LETTER OF TRANSMISSION

DEAR SIR: I am sending under another cover reprints of four papers which have led to the following request:

Will you contribute 400 to 500 words to a symposium in the *American Journal of Sociology* on the series of questions submitted herewith? The one group of questions was drawn up by Dr. Hoxie, the other by myself. If it is impracticable to answer the whole series, will you reply to one or more of the questions which may seem to you most pertinent? Our desire is not to elicit expressions of opinion about the merits of the printed discussion, but about the main questions concerned. I may add that we have no intention of inflicting upon you the burden of reading the four papers, but they are sent rather as evidence that the questions proposed have taken shape in the course of serious debate.

This request will be sent to twenty representatives of the social sciences.

As the subject is important to every student of the social sciences, it is hoped that you will be able to join in the discussion.

With thanks in advance for your favor,

Sincerely,

THE EDITOR,

The American Journal of Sociology.

THE QUESTIONS

I

1. Do you believe that reality is fixed in its ultimate nature and constitution? If not, (a) can you assign any absolute or ultimate or inviolable constitution to it? (b) Is any science or any group of correlated sciences capable of giving any "normal" or exclusively valid or ultimate or completed view and explanation of reality?

2. Is the following a valid definition of a social science? A social science is an examination and interpretation of human experience as such from some distinctive human standpoint, aspect, or interest; or it is an attempt to describe and explain or interpret human experience as it is ranged about and related to some one special interest which is for the time being regarded as the end of human experience. If such a definition be accepted, (a) Is any particular social science standing by itself merely or predominantly analytical in its treatment of human experience. (b) Does not a science thus constituted make constant use of the results and conclusions of other similarly constituted sciences? (c) Can sciences thus constituted then rightly be called fragmentary? (d) Can they rightly be called independent? (e) How can such sciences be "correlated" so as to give a complete view of human relations?

II

3. What is your opinion of the proposition: The indicated function of the social sciences at their present stage is to co-operate in finding a detailed content for some comprehensive conception of human relations?

4. What is your opinion of the following as a formula of such guiding conception?—For our intelligence the most central process within the range of experience is the evolution of human personality; for our intelligence, therefore, every separable phase of human experience must get its meaning and valuation from the connections which we discover between it and the central process of the evolution of persons (4th reprint, p. 219).

THE ANSWERS

PROFESSOR T. N. CARVER, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I have had so many other things pressing that I have not been able to give the necessary study to the list of questions which you did me the honor to send me until I am afraid that it is too late to answer your purpose. However, inasmuch as I find myself in such complete disagreement with the whole trend of the discussion perhaps it is just as well if I am too late. What I have to say cannot throw much light upon the exact question under controversy. My answers and comments follow:

1. I believe that it is, but I do not know.
2. I do not think that I can understand the definition, therefore I can neither assent nor dissent.
3. I am not certain that I know what is meant by a "detailed content for some comprehensive conception of human relations," and therefore I cannot say whether it is "the indicated function of the social sciences" or not.
4. I have a very poor opinion of the formula because it seems a labored one—so labored as to lose its meaning.

I have tried to make something out of the questions, but as you see, I have not succeeded. It seems to me that sociology, instead of being a master-

science, comes nearer being a science of "left overs." If ethics had continued to cover the ground which Aristotle laid out for it there would never have been such separate sciences as politics and economics. But as ethics has *actually* developed it covers a much narrower field. Again, politics as developed by such writers as Hobbes and Locke, left little room for economics or sociology either. But politics was narrowed down to the study of government, and economics occupied the remainder of the field. But economics has also been narrowed down, and sociology is inflicted upon the world for the sins of the economists. If economists had occupied the whole field laid out for them by Adam Smith there would have been very little excuse for sociologists. Therefore I am inclined to define sociology as economics broadened out. It is the study of the factors and conditions of human well-being, and thus includes a number of factors, such as selection, heredity, etc., which economists usually neglect.

PROFESSOR JOHN B. CLARK, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

I pass over the first question as not in my province of thought and study.

The definition of a social science suggested in the second question appears to me to err in not bringing into the foreground the relations of men to each other rather than the nature of the individuals. Society is an organism and the distinctive fact about it is the interactions of its atomic parts, the men who compose it. Of course the ultimate forces are, as it were, atomic, residing in the individuals, and the facts concerning individuals are among the data of the social science. The collecting of such facts is rather the work of other sciences. The word, *human*, which is repeatedly used in the questions would suggest a distinction between facts concerning man and those concerning dumb animals, inanimate objects, or disembodied spirits; but it does not suggest the distinction between the social atom and the interactivities of the atoms. It could lead a reader to infer that social science aimed to become encyclopedic in attaining and presenting facts about man, who of course is the subject of a number of other sciences. Section *b* of the question suggests, in this connection, the essential fact, namely, that social science uses the results of other sciences. They are among its data, and the use it makes of them is what it can claim as its own. Those other sciences are not parts of the social one. Political economy uses as data the results of the study of physics; but physics is not a part of political economy.

As to sections *c* and *d* of the question, the social science and others are in no true sense fragmentary, though each presents a part of what makes the total of knowledge. As to data, they are to a large extent interdependent, but as to their processes and conclusions they are, in a natural sense of the term, largely independent.

My objection to the definition suggested in question number two applies to that in question number three, and even to the one in question number four.

Human personality is an ultimate fact—one of the supremely important data. Sociology has to do with a higher organism and the relations and interactions of the men who are its members. A science may be social in a very different sense, and may study men as they are controlled and individually modified by society; but in that case it is not a truly social science. Sociology proper succeeds best when it gives attention altogether to the higher organism of which men are members and, in studying men, investigates only their relations and interactivities. Such facts as it needs about men themselves are either matters of common knowledge or are furnished by other sciences. Working in this plane sociology has an enormous field and there is no need of going beyond it.

PROFESSOR DAVID KINLEY, THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1. I should accept the definition of social science as given in lines four to eight of paragraph two, with slight modifications, as follows:

A social science is an examination, description, and interpretation of human experience from the point of view of one predominating special interest or of related special interests, which, for the time being, are regarded as the aim of human activity.

From this point of view I do not regard any particular social science as merely analytical in its treatment of its materials. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that the logical method of treatment depends more largely on the temperament of the writer than on the nature of the subject-matter. Sociology, political science, and economics can all be treated in a purely analytical way with some valuable results and can also be treated in large measure in a synthetic manner.

2. However, any science whose method of treatment is predominantly analytical certainly must make constant use of conclusions of other sciences. I should hesitate to call such sciences fragmentary, unless the word is carefully defined. I should prefer to call them partial. That is, I should regard them as explanations of part of the field of human experience. They are incomplete from the point of view of a general social philosophy, but complete in covering the whole field of human activity, though from a special point of view.

I do not think there is any science that can be called logically or substantially "independent." Each draws on the others for its materials, and its premises. They are interdependent. The general problem of social philosophy, I take it, is to determine the resultant social life produced by the interaction of the social life phases which are the conclusions of the separate social sciences. Since I do not admit that the separate social sciences are fragmentary, or that they properly can be described as investigating segments of human experience, but rather that each one presents a complete study of all human experience from a special point of view, each one must

present in its conclusions complete social life. The phases of the complete social life yielded by the different social sciences react on one another to produce the resultant actual life of society. I think that the study of the interaction of these phases may properly be regarded as a separate field of knowledge. It is the study of social adjustments.

3. I should modify this a little. The difference is perhaps in emphasis merely. I should put it: From the point of view of a complete social philosophy: the function of each social science is to supply a detailed content of human experience from the point of view of that particular social science, with the ultimate object of correlating their conclusions in order to establish a comprehensive and general conception of human relations. I believe that the thought intended in your paragraph is sound.

4. I think the formula given in this paragraph is scientifically sound as a principle of guidance in social investigation.

To my mind no phase of human experience is either of meaning or of value as an isolated phenomenon.

PROFESSOR E. A. ROSS, THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

1. The properties of the elements and the manner of operation of the natural forces are so fixed that sciences like physics and chemistry attain stability. Copper sulphate is today just what it was in Thales' time. Species of plants and animals change a little in the centuries, but zoölogy and botany, still more biology, are stable enough. On the other hand, the social sciences deal with human beings; and these evolve, owing to changes in the culture-content of their minds and owing to changed relations to their environment. The progress of ideas and inventions so alters the reaction modes of men that the behavior of people today in a given situation, or with a given institution or law, is not the same as in the days of Thales. This transformation of the subject-matter of sociology is so determining that the sociology a master mind, like Aristotle, might produce today would have little more than antiquarian interest in the year 2407; whereas if he gave himself to human physiology he might hope to remain a high authority at that remote date.

2. I cannot accept the definition. I think of a social science as explaining the manifestations in the social field (i. e., in human relations, conflicts, co-operations, conventions, institutions, etc.) of some distinguishable order of human desires ("interests" Dr. Small would say). The social sciences are in some respects distinct, in others interdependent. Correlated they must be in a measure, for whatever alters average personality (e. g., culture advance or a let-up in the struggle for existence) may bring about disturbance in all the orders of human desire and therefore in the subject-matter of all the social sciences.

3. Accepted.

4. I accept the formula in general, but find it too sweeping. I would prefer to say that the behavior in the social field of men actuated by any one order of desire can never be completely explained without reference to the central process—the evolution of persons—and ultimately to the crisis in this or that department of human experience that brings about a given evolution of persons. The social scientist may work long and profitably in his special field, but sooner or later he must connect up with the other social scientists through this central process of evolving personality.

PROFESSOR LESTER F. WARD, BROWN UNIVERSITY

I will try to answer the points *seriatim*, but I do not think anything I can say will be worth anything, certainly not worth publishing. I read all the articles as they appeared.

I

1. I do not understand "reality" to be anything in and of itself, or to have any "nature" or "constitution." That would belong to the old ontological metaphysics. Anything that is real, i. e., that exists, is *a* reality, and there are as many realities as there are things that exist. When you say "reality" I understand you to mean real things, nearly in the sense of what is true, but regarded objectively—nature, matter, and its relations, "things as they are."

2. Both the definitions of a "social science" seem correct, but a dozen others might also be given and be correct. I have always confined it to "human" phenomena, and given my reasons. Some extend it to animals.

(a) Some treatises on, or treatments of, social science are predominantly analytical and others are predominantly synthetic; e. g., my *Applied Sociology*, Part II, is an analytical treatment, and my *Dynamic Sociology*, Vol. II, is a synthetic treatment of the same subject. (b) It seems to me that both analytical and synthetic treatments of almost any science, and especially of social science, must "make constant use of the results and conclusions of other similarly constituted sciences," and of others that are not "similarly constituted." (c) The term "fragmentary" does not seem to be a happy one by which to characterize any of the established and recognized sciences, not even the so-called special social sciences. (d) They may properly be called "independent" in the sense that they are complete disciplines, but no science is in reality independent. The interdependence of the sciences is admitted by all. (e) There are two ways in which the sciences may be "correlated." The great primary ones can be arranged in serial order as determined by their relative generality and speciality, and their relative simplicity and complexity (these always going hand in hand), as well as by the natural filiation, or the affiliation of the higher upon the lower. The lesser secondary sciences should be arranged in synoptical form under the primary ones, as geology

under astronomy, zoölogy under biology, etc. All the "special social sciences" thus fall under sociology.

II

3. The proposition seems to me a little obscure. Perhaps this is due to redundant words. If it means that the special social sciences co-operate in the creation of a general social science, there can be no objection to it. It follows from the synoptical arrangement referred to under I, 2, (e).

4. The use of the words "personality" and "persons" obscures the meaning, and I am not sure what that is. The evolution of individual men seems to be involved in the evolution of the human race. This belongs rather to anthropology than to sociology, but is a condition to the evolution of society. "The most central process" for the sociologist is the formation of groups, or associated "persons." (I may entirely misunderstand this number.)

PROFESSOR HUTTON WEBSTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

1. Questions as to the "ultimate nature and constitution" of reality being metaphysical, not sociological, in character, I can only answer as metaphysician, not as sociologist, that there is an "absolute," "ultimate," and "inviolable" constitution of reality and that it is the high function of philosophy to interpret that reality to us. Building upon the foundations of the several sciences and correlating their results into an intelligible whole, philosophy may by successive approximations at length attain a "normal," "exclusively valid," "ultimate," and "completed" view of reality.

2. Accepting the definition of a social science here given as valid and explanatory, I answer: (a) that the science of "sociology" seems to me to be "predominantly analytical" in its treatment of human experiences; (b) that it does make constant use, by the very nature of its being, of the results and conclusions of other social sciences; (c) that the other social sciences are "fragmentary" in the sense that botany and zoölogy are fragmentary unless subsumed under the more general science of biology; that (d) the special social sciences as academic disciplines may properly be treated as "independent" while, nevertheless, yielding allegiance at every step of their progress to the general science of social relations usually denominated sociology; and that (e) the problem of "correlation" will, in a measure, solve itself as we gradually push backward and inward our investigations in each of the social sciences. The way to develop the "social science" of the future is to make as fruitful and useful as possible the "social sciences" of the present.

3. The "biological analogy" above noted may again prove helpful here. One does not say that the "indicated function" of botany and zoölogy is simply to find a "detailed content" for some comprehensive conception of organic relations. That is, indeed, one of their functions, and a function important enough. But the biological sciences are also important subjects of study for

themselves—to the analyst as well as to the synthesist of organic life. Hence I conceive that we shall always find a place for an ever-growing group of social sciences whose devotees will be usefully employed in cultivating, by the most intensive methods, their own particular plats in the sociological garden.

4. As a general formula, the statements in this paragraph seem to me unimpeachable from the point of view of the *synthesist* of human relations and human experience. But the *analyst* may well urge, as indicated above, that for practical purposes, it is sufficient to take one thing at a time; that there is danger in generalizing about the “evolution of human personality” before we have made the most exhaustive studies possible of every phase of human experience.

RÉSUMÉ

ALBION W. SMALL

As a referendum, the six statements, however important in themselves, have of course no inductive value. The total result of the inquiry serves principally to point the moral suggested by the old definition of an egotist—“a man who is always talking about himself when you want to be talking about yourself.” If doubt anywhere existed, this inquiry may fairly be taken as creating a rather plausible presumption that there is comparatively little interest today among American specialists in the social sciences about questions of general methodology. These men are busy with subjects that interest them more, and I am not disposed to think hard even of those who were too much preoccupied to send a postal card saying that they were otherwise engaged.

At the same time, it would be unfortunate to close the incident without making it an occasion for one more reiteration of what ought to be a truism, but which at present has only the force of a vagary, viz., that this prevalent contempt for live-questions of the bearings of different parts of social science upon one another does credit to nobody. Irrespective of the right or wrong of positions in debate between Dr. Hoxie and myself, the degree of aloofness from reality which passes among us for scholarship is a serious misfortune. There is one question, and one only, which in the last analysis gives social science under any name first-rate dignity. However we may phrase the question, it amounts to

this: What is potentially in human beings, and how may human beings who have begun to be conscious of themselves make the most headway in realizing these possibilities? So far as I am able to see, this question is closer on the track of the last meaning we can discover for life than any other. I can see nothing but hysteries in any human activity whatsoever which is not in some way contributing its quota toward answering this question. Sciences all seem to me so many triflings with capricious conceits about life, unless each in its way is co-operating with all other investigations of human experience in working out the completest report possible upon the main question. In the last resort, the place of any science in the gamut between triviality and importance must be fixed by the degree of its participation in this co-operative inquiry.

Back of the chaos of opinions about the relations of social sciences to one another, and back of the still worse pedantry that pursues faddishly isolated social curiosity-hunting without caring whether it is related to anything else than individual whim, is indifferentism or agnosticism about any main meaning which gives the incidents of life a scale of values. These questions of methodology have their chief value in their bearing upon this fundamental unfaith. We either do or do not believe that there is an underlying moral economy which it is the interest of all mankind to know. We either believe or we do not believe that every specialization of knowledge about society is on trial until it connects up with all that can be ascertained about the entire system of moral economy which human evolution demonstrates. The attitude of the social scientists in the United States points to a considerable preponderance of opinion that the idea of an underlying moral economy in the affairs of men is a myth. If this is so, then we may take our pick of the interests which we shall think and act about, and our choice makes no difference. If it is not so, if men's actions tend to promote or to retard some central process, then it makes a mighty difference if in thought or deed we assume the contrary.

I have urged that, from a spectator's point of view, the chain of human experience, so far as it is open to observation, amounts

to an unconsciously co-operative process of finding out what is latent in the capacities of men, and how those possibilities may be realized. I have urged that this fact points to the proper temper of co-operation among social sciences. If there is a trunk line of evolution of this sort, the only rational inference is that special social sciences are standing in their own light unless they try to carry on their work so that it will both give meaning to and get meaning from this central process.

Whether few or many assent to this statement of the situation, it is the clearest view I can get of the truth, and I shall do my best to recommend this interpretation of life and science until some other view can establish superior claims.